



# EDUCATIONAL AND SOCIO-CULTURAL STATUS OF GOND TRIBE IN INDIA

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## ABSTRACT

Tribe in Social anthropology, is a notional form of human social organization based on set of smaller groups (known as bands) having temporary or permanent political integration, and defined by traditions of common descent, language, culture and ideology. One of such tribes is Gond tribe, of Dravidian stock, which is believed to have its origin in a period prior to the southward migration of Dravidian people of India, aprox. around 2000 B.C. Some excerpts from Rig-veda also indicates connections of Gonds with 'Kuyevo' tribe prominent contemporarily. They ruled over central Indian region including southern slopes of Satpuda plateau, portions of Nagpur plains, Narmada and Godavari valley which encompassed together was historically known as Gondwana

**KEYWORDS:** Social Anthropology, Political Integration, Dravidian, Region

## INTRODUCTION

According to 2011 census of India, Gonds, the major tribe of the country has been notified as scheduled tribe in states of Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Orissa, Karnataka, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh and Uttaranchal having a total population of 1,13,44,629. Their original language is a Gondi dialect. Which with same consistency is being spoken, over considerable area of old Gondwana. Gond Rulers were subdivided into multiples thrones. like Raj- Gonds(ruling class), Khatola-Gonds, Madia Gonds, Dhur Gonds, Mokasi Gonds, Dadve Gonds, Gaita Gonds, Koya Gonds etc.

This tribe initially was completely dependent on natural resources around them, as pastoralists. Who carried a significant part of their history in southern India, then marched and settled in Central Indian region of Nagpur. But, after coming in contact with central Indian political powers they transformed themselves into a ruling class and then onwards till British Raj they continued their monarchies and maintained them intact. But while having this Rule of tribe during its existence as a tribe multiple factors like sub-ordination by neighboring contemporary powers left some of significant imprints on both society and culture of Gond tribe.

### Objective

1. To understand emergence and evolution of Gond society and culture.
2. To investigate historical background that influenced evolution of Gond culture and society.
3. To analyze socio-cultural changes in Gondi culture and society caused by subordination from contemporary neighboring- competitive powers with greater emphasis on

### Research Methods and tools used

1. Content analysis

2. Literature Review

### Brief Historical background of Gonds:

With reference to this study Tribe's history can be arranged more vividly in two fine and successive stages.

1. Gond Kingdom of period before arrival of Bhosle-Maratha rule in central India i.e. Gondwana.
2. Internal dynastic struggles in Gondwana Kingdom which eventually resulted in Maratha intervention and gradual decline of kingdom.

### Gond kingdom of period before arrival of Bhosle-Maratha rule in central India:

This initial stage starts around 900 A.D. when a tribe initially was completely dependent on natural resources from forests around them and carried a significant part of their history in southern India. Then onwards roughly after 1000 A.D. they started their northward journey initially up to Godavari into Vidarbha, and from there they moved up to Indravati in Bastar of modern state of Chhattisgarh as well as Wardha and Wainganga of Satpuda range in state of Maharashtra.

Characteristic feature of this stage are significant- religiously they used to worship nature having extreme animism with faith in supernatural powers associated with nature. They had their own language which can be deciphered and have much inclination towards Dravidian language family both in terms of Script as well as Pronunciations. This stage was of some uniform lifestyle without much vivid changes in their culture and so in their social organization.

The first historically recorded Gond kingdoms came up in central India's hilly region in the 14th and 15th century AD. The first Gond king was Jadurai, who deposed Kalchuri Rajputs, at whose court he had earlier worked, to grab the kingdom of Garha Mandla (modern Mandla and Jabalpur in Madhya

Pradesh). The second kingdom of Deogadh (Chhindwada in Madhya Pradesh and Nagpur in Maharashtra), was created by King Jatba in the 15th century. One of his successors, who after consolidating 12 smaller villages established the Town of Nagpur in 1702, Bakht Buland Shah, converted to Islam to win the favour of emperor Aurangzeb. However, he did not demand conversion from his subjects and married a Gond woman. He fell into disfavour in Delhi after he plundered some Muslim kingdoms of Deccan. Around the same time as Deogadh, the Kherla (Baitul in Madhya Pradesh to Chikhaldara in Amravati district in Maharashtra) kingdom also came up. Its first king, Narsingh Rai, who deposed a Rajput ruler, had love-hate relationship with the Rajput and Muslim rulers in his vicinity who attacked his fort due to its geographical accessibility. The kingdom was later annexed by Bakht Buland Shah. The Chanda kingdom (Chandrapur in Maharashtra), a contemporary of the Kherla and Deogadh kingdoms, produced several remarkable rulers who developed excellent irrigation systems and the first well defined revenue system among the Gond kingdoms. Sociological perspective shows that sequence of events during this period influenced Gond culture in very remarkable manner. After deposing Rajput rulers from Garha Mandla a new sense of ruling ignited among Gond Community. Taking Rajput rule as a yardstick a new monarchy emerged. New names resembling Rajput culture were being adopted. e.g. Hirde Shah of Mandla. Dalpat Shah of Garha etc. primarily being a Tribal/Adivasi community it is established that, Gond culture had considerable extent of Patriarchy where women was considered reasonable and important unit of culture in terms of working or earning livelihood but in terms of political rule and general nature of women she was considered not valuable than mens. Therefore, associating terms of valour of womens on battlefield was out of the blue in Gond culture. But in unique example of battle of Gonds against Mughal army of Emperor Akbar in leadership of Viceroy Asaf Khan it is exceptional that Rani Durgavati chose death over impending defeat by enemy forces. Gonds having not an established religion started worshiping cows as a sacred part of hindu ritualism, Gond monarchs started performing 'Hiranyagarbha Yadnya' (sacrifice) a theological key to become Hindu Kshatriya. Gondi people started adopting hindu theological concepts of Deities like of 'Badadeo' supposed to be Shiva (chief Deity of Rajput and hinduism) and Danteshwari of Dantewada in modern state of Chhattisgarh supposed to be Mahakali. In this way amalgamation of Gonds under Mughals or their subordinates i.e. Rajputs left some significant imprints on culture of Gonds in terms of both theologically as well as ethically. Internal dynastic struggles in Gondwana Kingdom which eventually resulted in Maratha intervention and gradual decline of kingdom Bhosle-Maratha of Nagpur are considered as blood-relatives of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj from their ancestral genealogy and are supposed to hail from village Beradi near Hingani in the present Pune district of state of Maharashtra. Reason of Their arrival into Vidarbha is still unknown but it is evident that contemporary of Shivaji maharaj, Sabaji bhosle of Nagpur rendered him help during his expeditions to Vidarbha.

First prominent ruler from Bhosle Family Parsoji Bhosle earns credit of consolidating Gondwana from Gond rulers, who after proving his loyalty towards the 'gaadi' of Chhatrapati Rajaram

Maharaj received honour of Jari Patka and title of 'Sena Saheb Subha' in 1699. After clash with Mughals Chhatrapati shahu maharaj worried about central indian territory of Maratha rule and hence handed over the official title of 'Sena sahib subha' and issued a sanad granting him and his successors in perpetuity 'mokasa' of the following places-

- Prant Ritapur and Sarkar-Gavel, Prant Berar, Prant Deogad, Chanda and Gondavana and 147 Mahals Around Nagpur. (S.K. Sane, 1915)

After successful establishment of partial independent rule of Nagpur-Bhosle's over a small region Raghuj Bhosle emerged as a second prominent ruler after Parsoji. At the same time some internal dynastic struggle started taking blaze in Gondwana kingdom. Chanda Sultan died in about 1738. His illegitimate son, Wali Sah killed Mir Bahaddar, the legitimate son of Chanda Sultan. Rani Ratan Kuvar, the widow of Chanda asked for Raghuj Bhosle's help as her two other sons Akbar and Burhan were minors. Raghuj at once proceeded and after prisioning Wali Shah settled dispute of inheritance. As a symbol of gratitude Rani Ratan Kuvar considered Raghuj as her third son and gave him the third part of her kingdom. She paid him Rupees Ten Lacs for war expenses. In 1737, the Rani granted Raghuj a sanad of her one-third kingdom bestowed upon him. The Rani also agreed that she would not enter into a treaty with any other power without the knowledge of Raghuj. With the possession of these parts of Devagad, Raghuj shifted his headquarters from Bham (in modern district of Yawatmal) to Nagpur. And finally the crown edifice of Gondwana- Deogarh Kingdom was made a part of Bhosle-Maratha's kingdom. Consistently Garha-Mandla was also included in Bhosle rule. Following these development, the only part of Gondwana Kingdom left after all these developments, Chanda was also included in Maratha Kingdom with grant of pension to heirs of Chanda. As Rani Ratan Kuvar herself gave a part of her kingdom to Raghuj Bhosle it was perceived as a willful and friendly initiative by monarch on common people of tribe. This gave a sense of respect towards Maratha rule and hence their culture was supposed as ideal one.

### Marriage:

There existed various type of marriages in the traditional Gond society, like Ostasana Marmi (Regular), Lamsena or Lamhade Marmi (by Service), Kotavalda or Ata sata (by Exchange), Poyse Ottur or Kals Ottur (by capture), Arwitana /Harvititur or Haiwar Marmi (by Elopement), Haiwark wat/Paitu or Odiyattur Marmi (by Intrusion), Pat or Tiks Tasana Marmi (Adult or Widow Marriage), Yer Dosana Marmi (Bhul Bihao) etc. Maratha culture turned down these methods with some ideal options. Moreover, the Gonds now disassociate themselves from the marriages by capture, intrusion and elopement, and consider these anti-socials. They admire marriage by proper settlement and all of them participate in it most cordially. Among the Gonds marriage was forbidden between blood relatives. Apart from the wishes of the boy and girl, receiving the consent of the father and mother was paramount. After Maratha rule The Raj Gonds, the ruling Gonds, married according to Hindu customs, while in the common Gonds the marriage ceremonies were conducted by 'doshi', or 'Baiga'.

An important aspect of marriage system was bride price which under Maratha rule got inverted into Groom price traditional feature of Marathi culture as 'Aandan'. Widow marriage was allowed in the Gond society. Their marriage systems were also pro-women. But Marathi culture strictly prohibited widow Remarriage which was emulated into the tribal traditions. Marriage type was of strict Exogamy between different 'saga' with a prevalent polygamy. Irrespective of influence of Maratha rule the position of polygamy among Gonds no longer exists now. At present Gonds consider monogamy as an ideal form, and resort to polygamy in certain unavoidable circumstances. Cross-cousin marriages are still prevalent in Gond society which is considered as a strongly prevalent practice of Marathi culture.

### Religious life of Gonds:

#### *Gods and Goddesses:*

Specifically, gond tribe is a nature worshipping tribe with strong belief in certain 'totems'. They worship various trees and animals which are associated with totems. 'Saja tree' and 'Mahua' tree are still worshipped in all tribal regions of Maharashtra and Chattisgarh. Middle period of gond history witnessed emergence of a completely new religion of Gonds. This religion is known as 'Koyapunem'—meaning 'in the way of nature' which was founded by their ancestor 'Rupolang Pahandi Pari Kupa Lingo' who was born as the son of the chief 'Pulsheev', during the reign of Sambhu-Gaura several thousand years ago. Kupa Lingo became the ruler of the 'Koya' race and established the Gondi 'Punem', a code of conduct and philosophy that the Gondi practice. This philosophy had many elements similar to the Hinduism like 'munjok', which is non-violence, cooperation, and self-defense. Another part of Gond belief is 'salla' and 'gangra', which represent action and reaction, similar to karma in Hinduism. They also worshipped 'Ravana' the character portrayed in hindu mythology of 'Ramayana' and believed him as their deity and ancestor of 'pari kupa lingo'. When Maratha rule was adopted into practice some hardliner practitioners of Hinduism opposed this practice of worshipping ravana which is still a blazing pot in village of Paraswadi in Gadchiroli where tribe organize protest against burning of Ravana. Primarily tribes were nature worshipping units but soft power of good will and feeling of idealistic culture towards Hinduism of Bhosle-marathas(3) inspired them to deviate towards Hinduism. They started considering them as 'Kshatriya-hindu' by performing 'hiranyagarbha yadnya'(religious sacrifice), nature worshipping Gonds started worshipping 'Badadeo' believed to be Shiva of Hinduism, 'kali kankali of kachargarh' in state of Maharashtra believed to be 'Mahakali' of Hinduism, 'Danteshwari' of Dantewada in Chhattisgarh is believed to be Goddess 'Durga'. Historical analyses by Deogaokar(2007, 123) and Mehta(1984, 174) shows the primary reason behind this shift was because of the Sanskritisation brought initially with partial changes by Rajputisation and later majorly by rule of Bhosle-maratha rule of Nagpur.

### Concept of Death and Funeral practices:

Conventionally, Gonds bury their dead with the head of the body facing south in most regions, but to the west in some

areas. They consider north to be a direction of ill women that brings disaster. Among the Gond mythology, the dead were believed to be greatly interested in the affairs of the living. There was a keen desire to maintain contact and to solicit the presence of the dead to minimize the difficulties of the living, and to help to bring rain and aid the crops to thrive. In the underworld the soul, enjoyed the same status as they were on the earth and led the same desire for thing they owned here. Therefore, it was customary to offer worldly possession of man either inside or on the top of graveyard when a person died. He was also remembered on festive occasions. Thus the Gonds believed in life after death by contrast and hence buried deceased facing south. South is considered to be a holy direction. This is the reverse of Hindu convention. But after the period of Sanskritisation they started doing reverse with favour towards Hindu practice. They also shifted from burying dead to cremating them with inherent notion of cremation kills all ills associated with individuality and soul of deceased.

### Festivals:

Sociological analysis by Vahia and Halkare (2013) shows Gonds developed their own conceptualities of astronomical positions of different stars, moon and sun. Through this they developed their own calendar and hence had their own terminologies and rituals for distinctive festivals they invented themselves. Some prominent festivals are Akhadi, Jivti, Pola, Diwali Nawo tindana, Dussera, and Phag or Shimga festivals.

- Cultural changes
- Language

Language of communication for Gond tribe is Gondi which is considered as a dialect of modern language of telugu and is the only language apart from Gujrati to have its own script. It belongs to 'Indo-Dravidian language family' of Southern india. This language contains very basic terms and its speakers in general show higher dialectic intelligibility. Similar with prime principle of all other languages it is also encompassed of different dialects because of geographical variations among all four parts of Gondwana kingdom. Despite being a tribal language it was grammatically encoded with simplistic deliverability. Immediately after the Bhosle rule started in Gondwana, region flourished with the agrarian-marathi speaking population of kunbi and kohli communities and for the convenience for governance which was purely developed for productive areas of social and economic life like agriculture, Marathi was taken as official language of kingdom. From here the process of amalgamation of gondi language started taking pace. Word for revenue officer at village level i.e. 'Mukaddam' was replaced by 'Deshmukh' and 'Paatel'(mistaken for Patil of Marathi), some words were fully adopted from marathi in Gondi language. i.e. 'sage-soire'- a word which represents families connected with marital relations between them, akkal(mind), buddhi(intelligence), aggidabba(matchbox), achanak(immediate), anat/anat(orphan), pori(girl child)...etc. interestingly in this way the the Orthography of gondi language has changed in favour of other languages with which gondi language intermingled leading to the multilingual attitude from this community where they use language like Marathi in Vidarbha, Hindi in Chhattisgarh as a source language to communicate and borrow.



Maratha rule unintentionally not only declined importance of Gondi language from social strata of all people residing in kingdom but also native Gondi speakers. The inter group communication of Gonds earlier was purely in their own mother tongue which perished of gondi language after Bhosle rule came in kingdom culminating into lingual illiteracy of Gondi language among young generation in recent years. This had resulted in decrease of lexical similarity, dialectic intelligibility and attitude of using gondi language among Gondi speakers, whereas bilingual attitude and habit increased at unprecedented level. This process of amalgamation continued even after colonialism and independence of india. According to census 2011 among population of Gond people of 1,13,44,629 only 27,13,790 can speak Gondi language. (1) Because of political eclipse of Gond Kings gondi language became obsolete leading to political backwardness in representation of community.

#### **Gothul Institution:**

The traditional Gotul institutions of the Gonds had inculcated a sense of discipline and co-operative endeavor among their members. It was not just a club for meeting the boys and girls at night, as it was focused by some scholars. It was the centre of learning and had a religious affiliation to it. When there were no educational institutions available to the Gond community the Gotul was functioning like training centre. It inculcated the integrity and uniqueness among all the members of the Gotul. Prominent ruler of Bhosle-Marathas Raghuji Bhosle earlier promoted the institution. However, with time importance of 'Gothul' declined comparatively and consistently.

#### **Architecture and Arts:**

Gondi Culture had immense heritage of its paintings involving natural and native tribal themes. They were also expert in beautiful wall paintings and floral designs that depicted geometric designs and stylistic figures of plants and animals on the walls of their houses. However, descendance in their social status made them isolate in forest lives again where they could not revive these arts. Some of the arts that persisted like paintings started shifting their themes from nature-animism oriented to religion based.

#### **CONCLUSION**

With occurrence of relations with Rajput either through subjugation/subordination under Mughal rule or political/marital alliances with Rajputs, staged a culture of deviation in attitudes of Gond tribe i.e. Deviation in religious orientations, beliefs and cultural heritages. Being a social unit it is obvious to have sharing relationship of constituent elements between adjacent social systems. But in the wake of Bhosle rule over Gondwana kingdom especially in Vidarbha region this process of deviation from own culture or adoption of foreign culture proceeded with much faster pace. Absolute reasons cannot be drawn for this, but in relative terms much higher number of Marathi speaking and Hindu-maratha culture practicing community and idealistic and 'want-to-be' image for bhosle-maratha culture among Gond tribe, revolutionized this process. This led to socio-economic and most prominent cultural changes in Gond society. Some of these changes like ability to adopt most dynamic changes turned positive and beneficial

for the tribe but most of them turned to be negative. Gondi language is moving to be an endangered language with current status of only 23.9% (1) people among whole Gond population can speak their language. Social values of Gond tribes are withering day by day, productive institutions like Gothul have almost lost their significance as unit of cultural conservation and social construction. The Gonds have suitably accommodated a number of things in their household articles, human attires, food habits and personal hygiene's. Their endeavour to adapt new has made significant changes in their traditions, customs, values, and religious beliefs and rites, in the light of the Hindu way of life. Once upon a time the Gonds were the most cultured community. They have lost their royalty to paramount powers. They were good looking, happy and hearty and regular in their habits. Though financially not very sound but they managed their affairs without getting indebted at some extent. They observed perfect gender equality and attempted to keep their tribe widow free. They were docile, modest, honest and painstaking. Loyalty to their tribe, traditions, systems, organizations is praiseworthy and worth to be followed by elite class.

But this bhosle rule somehow hindered this pleasant flow of cultural evolution. It will be interesting to see what future is going to offer them?

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